

Quick Guide: Ten Commandments of Email

Email is definitely here to stay! Thank goodness and what a quick and easy way to communicate. However, is it always the best means? If you require an immediate answer a phone call may be better; if you're delivering unpleasant news it may be better to meet or talk on the phone; or if your message is highly confidential email may not be the most secure means of communicating. Once you have decided that email is the best means of communication for what you need to say, follow the Ten Commandments below:

- 1. Decide the purpose of your email** before tapping away at your keyboard. What do you want to achieve from this communication? State your purpose in the first couple of sentences.
- 2. Put your purpose in the subject line.** During the business day, email users may receive dozens, even hundreds, of messages so the battle to capture your recipient's attention and interest is fierce.
- 3. Make your message clear.** A meaningful subject line and stating the purpose within the first couple of sentences will help this. Then continue in as few words as possible.
- 4. Minimise the information.** Fit your email all on one screen so the reader doesn't have to scroll down.
- 5. Top and tail your emails.** You are communicating with a person so you will need to personalise your email with 'Hi ...' or 'Dear ...' or even just their name. Sign off with 'Thank you' or 'Regards' and then your name. You may wish to create a customised signature that you can easily add at the end of each email.
- 6. Follow all the plain English rules** of using plainer words, keeping sentences to an average of 15 – 20 words, avoiding wordy phrases and clichés and using the active voice.
- 7. Use a conversational tone.** Imagine you are talking to your recipient on a business level and adopt this same professional, conversational tone when you write.
- 8. Some things to avoid:** humour, shouting, text-speak and smileys.
- 9. Keep emotions under control.** If you are annoyed or upset about an email you have received you may be tempted to reply immediately. Take time out and write it later when you will be more objective and professional in your reply.
- 10. Edit before sending.** Email is so fast that you can easily spend a few moments checking sense, spelling, grammar and punctuation.

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